

# **Maya Leaders Alliance and Cultural Survival Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Belize**

## **Joint Stakeholder Submission on BELIZE**

Prepared for the 31st Session of the United Nations Human  
Rights Council  
Universal Periodic Review  
05 November 2018 – 16 November 2018

**March 29, 2018**

*The Maya Leaders Alliance (MLA) was organized to represent the rights of the Maya villages in the Toledo district. It is an umbrella organization, composed of a variety of representative and sectoral Maya organizations including the Toledo Alcaldes Association formed by the traditional elected leaders of all the Maya villages of southern Belize.*

*Cultural Survival is an international indigenous rights organization with a global indigenous leadership and consultative status with ECOSOC since 2005. Cultural Survival is located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and is registered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States. Cultural Survival monitors the protection of indigenous peoples' rights in countries throughout the world and publishes its findings in its magazine, the Cultural Survival Quarterly; and on its website: [www.cs.org](http://www.cs.org).*

# Maya Leaders Alliance and Cultural Survival Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Belize

## I. Executive Summary

1. The Maya Leaders Alliance (“MLA”) and Cultural Survival welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review (“UPR”) of Belize. Since its second UPR cycle on 28 May 2013, the government of Belize has failed to protect the rights of the Maya peoples by permitting acts by government agents and third parties (acting with the government’s acquiescence or tolerance), to affect the existence, value, use, or enjoyment of the land and other resources belonging to the Maya peoples, without the free, prior, and informed consent of the affected Maya communities. These activities include resource extraction, demolition of sacred sites, construction of buildings, logging, and road construction. Despite orders from its own Supreme Court and the Caribbean Court of Justice to do so, the government of Belize has failed to delimit, differentiate, and title the Maya territory, or to meaningfully consult with Maya peoples to protect Maya land rights. The government’s failures have resulted in the violation of the Maya peoples’ rights to be free from discrimination, rights to self-determination, and rights to property.

## II. Background

2. Belize is a relatively new country with a diverse population. When it became independent from Great Britain in 1981 it adopted a constitution that includes ideals of democracy and human rights among its foundational principles. It has a small, predominantly English-speaking population of roughly 360,000, of which about 40,000 are Maya. The Maya peoples primarily inhabit the southern part of Belize, and are the dominant group in the Toledo District of southern Belize.
3. Belize is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”), with ratification in 1996; party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (“ICESCR”), with ratification in 2015; party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (“ICERD”), with ratification in 2001; and has expressed its support for both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (“UDHR”) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (“UNDRIP”).
4. Despite its young age, Belize has a substantial history of adversely affecting the Maya peoples’ land and resources without their free, prior, and informed consent. In 1994 the government of Belize unilaterally designated a significant portion of Maya ancestral land as a national park.<sup>1</sup> In subsequent years, the government of Belize granted at least seventeen logging concessions on lands totaling approximately 480,000 acres in the Toledo

---

<sup>1</sup> Under Belize’s *National Parks System Act* (available at [belizelaw.org](http://belizelaw.org)), the declaration of a National Park has no effect on existing property rights.

District.<sup>2</sup> During the same period, the government granted oil exploration concessions in the area to AB Energy, Inc., a company based in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Maya organizations filed a lawsuit in the Supreme Court of Belize in late 1997 in an attempt to enjoin the logging and oil concessions, which ultimately proved fruitless.

5. In 2001 the government of Belize granted exclusive rights to conduct oil exploration within a twelve-square-mile area of the national park to U.S. Capital Energy Belize Ltd. (“U.S. Capital”).<sup>4</sup> Again, these oil concessions were granted without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Maya peoples.
6. In response to the ongoing oil and logging concessions and the failure to achieve redress in the national court system, the affected Maya communities brought a petition before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (“IACHR”), asserting violations of the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man. On 12 October 2004, the IACHR issued a decision recommending that Belize delimit, demarcate, and title the traditional lands of the Maya peoples of the Toledo district.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the IACHR recommended that Belize abstain from any acts that might lead the agents of the state, or third parties acting with its acquiescence or its tolerance, to affect the existence, value, use, or enjoyment of the property located in traditional Maya territory.
7. In April 2007, two Maya communities, Conejo and Santa Cruz, filed actions in the Supreme Court of Belize for recognition of their property rights under the Belizean Constitution. In October of 2007 the Supreme Court of Belize held that the government of Belize is obligated, under the constitutional rights to property, non-discrimination, life, liberty, security of the person, and protection of the law, to respect and protect Maya land rights in the Toledo District of southern Belize.<sup>6</sup> In its decision, the Supreme Court of Belize became the first national high court to cite the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (“UNDRIP”). The court acknowledged that the UNDRIP was a nonbinding instrument, but that “where these resolutions or Declarations contain principles of general international law . . . states are not expected to disregard them.”<sup>7</sup>
8. In a subsequent action, filed in 2008 on behalf of the 36 Maya villages that were not parties to the 2007 case, the Supreme Court again held in favor of the Maya villages collectively. This 2010 judgment was appealed to the highest court in the Belize judicial system, the Caribbean Court of Justice (“CCJ”). After contesting the assertion of Maya land rights in prior lawsuits, the government reversed its position before the CCJ and came to an agreement that was the basis for a judgment by consent. Accompanying the 22 April 2015

---

<sup>2</sup> S. James Anaya, *The Maya Petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights: Indigenous Land and Resource Rights, and the Conflict over Logging and Oil in Southern Belize*, in *Giving Meaning to Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, 180–211 (Isfahan Merali and Valerie Oosterveld eds., 2001).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Capital Energy Belize Ltd. Production Sharing Agreement, January 22, 2001 (on file with the author).

<sup>5</sup> *Case of Maya Indigenous Communities of Toledo v. Belize*, Case 12.053, Inter-Am. C.H.R. Report No. 40/04 (2004) (hereinafter “Maya Communities”).

<sup>6</sup> *Aurelio Cal v. Belize*, Supreme Court of Belize (Claims No. 171 and 172 of 2007) (Oct. 18, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at para. 131.

Consent Order,<sup>8</sup> was a written commitment signed by counsel for the government of Belize that defines the nature of the rights affirmed and sets out a schedule of dates for the demarcation process.<sup>9</sup>

9. Closely tracking the conclusions and recommendations of the IACHR, the CCJ judgment affirms that the Maya Indigenous Peoples of southern Belize have rights to the lands they have customarily used and occupied, rights which constitute property within the meaning of the Belize Constitution and are protected from discrimination. The CCJ order further requires the Government to identify and protect Maya property, and other rights arising from customary land tenure and abstain from interference with these rights if Maya consent has not been granted through a process of meaningful consultation.
10. The government of Belize has continued to disregard its duty to protect the rights of the Maya peoples by permitting acts by government agents and third parties (acting with the government's acquiescence or tolerance), to affect the existence, value, use, or enjoyment of the land and other resources belonging to the Maya peoples, without the free, prior, and informed consent of the affected Maya villagers. These activities, including resource extraction, demolition of sacred sites, construction of a building, logging, and road construction, continue despite the recommendations of the IACHR, the judicial decisions of the Supreme Court of Belize, and the CCJ Consent Order.

### III. Previous UPR Recommendations

11. During the first round of Universal Periodic Review of Belize on 5 May 2009, the Working Group adopted the following recommendations and urged Belize to:

*Redouble its efforts in favor of the respect of the rights of indigenous peoples, in line with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Mexico);<sup>10</sup> and,*

*Protect Mayan customary property rights in accordance with Mayan customary laws and land tenure practices in consultation with affected Mayan people of the whole Toledo district (Slovenia).<sup>11</sup>*

12. In disregard of Slovenia's recommendation, and despite their acceptance of Mexico's recommendation, Belize has failed to protect Maya customary rights by neglecting to delimit, demarcate, and title Maya customary land and to enact legislation that would protect these rights, in conformity with the principles expressed in the UNDRIP.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Statement of GOB's Commitment to Advance the Undertakings Contained in the Judgment in the CCJ Appeal No. 2 of 2014 (on file with the author).

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Belize, 4 June 2009, A/HRC/12/4 at para. 67(35).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at para. 68(9).

13. During the second round of Universal Periodic Review of Belize on 28 May 2013, the Working Group adopted the following recommendations and urged Belize to:

*Refrain from issuing new concessions for projects in Mayan territories without the free, prior and informed consent of the relevant Mayan community (Norway);<sup>12</sup> and,*

*Continue in its endeavours in consistently addressing the issues affecting indigenous peoples (Trinidad and Tobago);<sup>13</sup> and,*

*Adopt concrete measures, including special measures, such as acceding to ILO Convention No. 169, so that the Mayan indigenous peoples and certain persons of African descent have access to the labour market, housing and health care as well as combating poverty, exclusion and the discrimination they suffer from. Design intercultural and bilingual educational programmes to promote the integration of these ethnic groups (Honduras).<sup>14</sup>*

14. Despite the recommendations of Norway, Trinidad and Tobago, and Honduras, the government of Belize continues to discriminate against the Maya peoples by refusing to seek and obtain free, prior, and informed consent from the affected communities before granting logging and oil concessions on Maya customary lands and refusing to comply with court orders from its own Supreme Court and the CCJ.

#### **IV. Continuing Rights Violations**

##### Discrimination

##### *Denial of Effective Remedy*

##### **ICCPR art. 2(3), ICERD art. 6, UDHR art. 8, and UNDRIP art. 40**

15. The government of Belize, by failing to comply with the orders from its own courts and the CCJ, deprive the Maya peoples of the right to access to justice as they are obligated to do by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”), the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (“ICERD”), and as expressed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (“UHDR”), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (“UNDRIP”).
16. Both the 2007 and 2010 Supreme Court decisions and the CCJ judgment closely track the conclusions and recommendations of the IACHR, confirming that the Maya Indigenous Peoples of southern Belize have rights to the lands they have customarily used and occupied, rights which constitute property within the meaning of the Belize Constitution

---

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Belize, 28 October 2013, A/HRC/25/13 at para. 99.44.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at para. 98.22.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at para. 99.42.

and are protected from discrimination. The CCJ order further requires the government to identify and protect Maya property and other rights arising from customary land tenure and abstain from interference with these rights if Maya consent has not been granted through a process of meaningful consultation.

17. Three years post order, there has been no progress on behalf of the government of Belize to develop the legislative, administrative, or other measures necessary to delimit, demarcate, title, or otherwise clarify and protect Maya land.
18. In January 2016, the government established the Toledo Maya Land Rights Commission (“TMLR Commission”) under the authority of the Belize Attorney General as the government’s mechanism to implement the CCJ Consent Order. The TMLR Commission, chaired by former Minister of Forestry, Lisel Alamilla, was tasked with developing a draft implementation plan by 30 June 2016. No draft implementation plan has been completed.
19. Since its constitution, the TMLR Commission has only met with the MLA, the Maya peoples’ duly elected representative, twice—in February and June of 2016. The TMLR Commission has taken the view that it is for the government alone to determine the scope of the work to be done and the timeline to implement the Consent Order and, in accordance with that view, with whom they are obligated to consult. The TMLR Commission even stated in a recent CCJ Hearing of 23 October 2017 that it does not see the demarcation and documentation process as being within its mandate of work, and it does not expect the development of such a process to occur for several more years.
20. On 19 February 2018 the CCJ expressed its concern that the TMLR Commission was not consulting with the MLA/TAA on the implementation process. The TMLR Commission submitted to the court that they will meet twice with the MLA/TAA before 9 March 2018. The TMLR Commission has not fulfilled its undertaking, and has yet to meet with the MLA/TAA.
21. Furthermore, in its Consent Order, the CCJ awarded BZ\$300,000 as a remedy for violation of the Maya peoples’ constitutional rights. Instead of paying the damages to the Maya peoples, the government has asserted that the entire award was properly spent in establishing the TMLR Commission and the funding of its operations. According to the TMLR Commission’s own financial records<sup>15</sup> these operations have been primarily administrative, and the funds that have been spent toward meeting with villagers were not facilitative of meaningful consultation with the Maya peoples’ chosen representatives.
22. Most of the meetings that have been funded by the damages award have been between the TMLR Commission and a combination of Maya and non-Maya individuals and groups, or with solely non-Maya groups and organizations. To the best of the MLA’s knowledge, only four meetings have been held exclusively with Maya villagers or representatives. Ultimately, the majority of funds intended to remedy violations of Maya peoples’ rights have been expended in seeking input from non-Maya entities who have no interest in those

---

<sup>15</sup> Government of Belize Financial Summary, December 1, 2015–September 30, 2016, filed on Jan. 20, 2017 (on file with the author).

rights and who may wish to minimize or ignore those rights. Furthermore, the Toledo Alcaldes Association (“TAA”), a body composed of the collective traditional village leaders, and several individual Alcaldes were ejected from one such meeting, contrary to the court directive of undertaking good faith consultation.

23. The TAA’s Steering Committee, created to represent the Maya peoples in the consultation process and made up of mostly Maya subsistence farmers from the villages, have not been offered any per diems or travel allowances to facilitate their participation in the consultations. No funds have been provided to the Maya peoples’ representatives to facilitate their ability to prepare for and meaningfully participate in meetings; all Maya peoples’ participation thus far has been funded by themselves, including the funding of a mutually agreed upon project to translate the CCJ Consent Order and Judgment into the Maya languages.
24. By failing to comply with court orders from its own Supreme Court and the CCJ, and the recommendations of the IACHR, the government of Belize has denied the Maya peoples the fundamental right of effective remedy, which is a key component of the right of access to justice that is protected under numerous human rights instruments.

#### *Equality Before the Law*

**ICCPR arts. 2(1), 26; ICESCR art. 2(2); ICERD arts. 2(1), 5, 6; UDHR art. 7; UNDRIP art. 2**

25. By failing to protect judicially recognized Maya customary land rights, the government of Belize denies the Maya people equality before the law, despite their obligation to do so under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (“ICESCR”), the ICCPR, the ICERD, and as expressed in the UDHR, and the UNDRIP.
26. The CCJ Consent Order mandated that the government of Belize delimit, demarcate, and title or otherwise clarify and protect the territory in which the Maya peoples have a *communal property right*, in accordance with their *customary land use practices*. The government’s failure to comply with court orders, as described above, and their failure to prevent ongoing incursions on Maya lands, as described below, is a form of racial discrimination based on the Maya peoples’ status as Indigenous Persons and the nature of their customary land rights.

#### *Religious and Cultural Harms*

**ICCPR art. 18(1); UDHR arts. 18, 27(1); UNDRIP arts. 11(1), 12(1), 31(1)**

27. The government of Belize’s failure to protect Maya lands has resulted in damage to religious and cultural heritage, and is a form of religious discrimination that contravenes the ICCPR, and is repugnant to the principles expressed in the UDHR, and the UNDRIP.
28. In 2014 an individual named Rupert Myles trespassed upon communal property in the Maya village of Santa Cruz. Despite several eviction notices and attempts by the Maya peoples to stop him, Mr. Myles built a structure within the boundaries of Uxbenká—an

ancient Maya temple which is protected by the village of Santa Cruz. Moreover, Mr. Myles bulldozed a driveway connecting the house to the road and burned the surrounding vegetation so that he could farm there. Through these actions, Mr. Myles violated the village's prohibition against individuals living or building on or near the Uxbenká site.

29. When their own efforts to remove Mr. Myles proved unsuccessful, the Santa Cruz villagers sought help from the Belize Police Department to protect the religious and cultural site. The Belize Police Department refused to assist the affected villagers. Furthermore, the villagers sought help from the National Institute of Culture and History, who ignored their requests for over a year before finally issuing an eviction letter to Mr. Myles.
30. To date, many of the structures that Myles built remain on Uxbenká. Moreover, the damage to the site will likely be permanent. The government of Belize's failure to protect the Uxbenká archeological site, by acquiescing to Mr. Myles continued trespass—in violation of the original *Maya Land Rights Case* of 2007 and the CCJ Consent Order, as well as its obligations under the Belize Constitution<sup>16</sup>—implicates rights to religion and culture protected by numerous human rights instruments.

### Self-Determination

#### *Right to Self-Government in Matters Relating to Internal Affairs*

**ICCPR arts. 1(1), 1(3); ICESCR art. 1(1), 1(3); UNDRIP arts. 3, 4, 18, 19, 33(2)**

31. The government of Belize, by not recognizing the duly elected representatives of the Maya peoples during the court mandated consultation process, has denied the Maya peoples their right to self-determination as protected by the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and in contravention of numerous principles expressed in the UNDRIP.
32. Since its creation in January 2016, the TMLR Commission has met with the MLA, the Maya peoples' duly elected representative, only twice in 2016, and twice more in 2017, despite numerous meeting requests from the MLA. Of central importance, the TMLR Commission determined the nature and structure of these meetings, and was not receptive to input from the MLA and the TAA. Since the June 2016 meeting, the government has attempted to challenge both the MLA and the TAA's legitimacy as the chosen representative of the Maya peoples.
33. The government of Belize has taken the position that it is for the Attorney General to appoint the Maya peoples' traditional leaders—the Alcaldes—which is fundamentally at odds with the Maya peoples' rights to self-determination, and only serves to undermine the legitimacy of the Maya peoples' chosen representatives. Moreover, the government of Belize has given no regard to the Maya Consultation Framework, and has mischaracterized

---

<sup>16</sup> CONST. OF BELIZE art. 3 (obligating the government to provide protection for fundamental rights, including collective property rights that derive from Maya traditional land use).

the MLA and the TAA before the CCJ as “gate keepers” between the TMLR Commission and the Maya peoples.<sup>17</sup>

34. The parties to the 2007 and 2010 land rights cases were the MLA and the TAA, which is comprised of the traditional Alcaldes of the Maya villages in the Toledo District. The TAA was a party to the original 1997 land rights litigation, it supported the two villages in the 2007 *Re Maya Land Rights* litigation, and it was the main party to the litigation that resulted in the CCJ Consent Order. In response to the government’s challenge to the TAA and MLA’s standing in the 2008 litigation, the Supreme Court ruled that both organizations were legitimate representative claimants for the collective Toledo District Maya villages.
35. Despite being estopped from claiming that the TAA and the MLA (and by proxy, the Steering Committee chosen by the TAA to represent them in the consultation and implementation process) are not the legitimate representatives of the Maya communities in the Toledo District, the government has openly denigrated their legitimacy and has failed to meaningfully include them in the implementation process. The TMLR Commission has taken the unilateral position that MLA and the TAA are but two groups among many with whom they are obligated to consult, and that the scope of its work and the timeline for implementation are solely the purview of the TMLR Commission.
36. The TMLR Commission’s position is incompatible with both the spirit and the letter of the CCJ Consent Order, as the MLA and the TAA represent the duly appointed leaders of the Maya villages in the Toledo District, elected and chosen per the custom of the Maya peoples. The government has undertaken consultations with individual villages in the Toledo District, without the inclusion or consent of the MLA or TAA, in an effort to undermine their authority as representatives of the Maya peoples in the eyes of the CCJ.
37. By marginalizing and bypassing the Maya peoples’ own procedures and representative institutions, the government has failed to conduct good-faith consultation towards implementation of the Consent Order with the Maya peoples, and to respect their right to self-determination, which is protected under numerous human rights instruments.

### Property Rights

#### *The Right to use Natural Wealth and Resources*

**ICCPR art. 47; ICESCR art. 25; UDHR arts. 17, 22;  
UNDRIP arts. 20(1), 26(1), 32(2), 34, 35**

38. The government of Belize’s failure to protect the rights of the Maya peoples by permitting acts by government agents and third parties (acting with the government’s acquiescence or tolerance), to affect the existence, value, use, or enjoyment of the land and other resources belonging to the Maya people has denied them the right to use their natural wealth and resources, as is protected by the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and expressed in the UDHR and the UNDRIP.

---

<sup>17</sup> Government of Belize’s Compliance Report to CCJ Appeal NO. 2 of 2014, filed on Jan. 20, 2017 (on file with the author).

39. The government's delay in the demarcation of Maya lands has led to further trespass upon, and appropriation of, Maya lands. These failures led to two cases filed in the Supreme Court of Belize in 2016 to uphold Maya land rights. The first arose from the government's failure to protect the Uxbenká archeological site in the village of Santa Cruz from trespass, as discussed above, as it was obligated to do under the original *Maya Land Rights Case* of 2007 and the CCJ Consent Order. The second case arose from the government's expropriation of land to build a government highway through the Jalacte village in contravention of applicable laws and the CCJ Consent Order.
40. The government has continued to acquiesce to third party encroachment on Maya lands, which were described in this organization's 2013 submission to the Seventeenth Session of the Working Group on the UPR.<sup>18</sup> The government granted permits authorizing the removal of mahogany logs from Golden Stream lands without the consent of the affected Maya village. A new logging permit was signed on 15 May 2015, after the issuance of the Consent Order, and has since been renewed. Moreover, on 8 March 2016, the Ministry of Economic Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade and Commerce approved a one (1) year extension of an oil concession on Maya territory to US Capital. Again, the oil concession was granted without the consent of the affected Maya villages.
41. At a supervision hearing before the CCJ in January 2016, the government suggested that it would consider creating a forum or mechanism to resolve such issues without resorting to litigation, which is prohibitively expensive for Maya villages. No such mechanism has been established, nor has there been any consultation with the MLA or any other indication that one is being contemplated.
42. As exemplified by the above mentioned Jalacte and Santa Cruz cases, the incursions on, and taking of, Maya village lands have yet to be resolved. The continued illegal logging in Golden Stream and the extension of US Capital's oil concession, without the consent of the affected Maya villages, further demonstrate the government's failure to abstain from acts that affect the existence, value, use, and enjoyment of the property of the Maya people.
43. In addition to its failure to resolve ongoing incursions, since its last UPR review, the government of Belize has engaged in new activities that have affected Maya customary land rights, in contravention of the letter and the spirit of the orders from the Supreme Court and the CCJ.
44. Logging activities in the Dolores village have been undertaken by Jimmy Lazano of the Cayo district in 2016 – 2017 without consent from the affected village. Under the Consent Order, regardless of any lease, permit, grant, or deed conveying a logging concession, the permit holder may no longer exercise the concession without the consent of the village. The village has reported the illicit activity to the Forestry Department, requesting the Department to require Mr. Lazano to cease and desist his activities, but no reply has been

---

<sup>18</sup> Maya Leaders Alliance & Cultural Survival, *Joint Stakeholder Submission on BELIZE, Seventeenth Session of the Working Group on the UPR*, Mar. 11, 2013, available at [https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/media/2013\\_upr\\_stakeholders\\_report\\_belize\\_0.pdf](https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/media/2013_upr_stakeholders_report_belize_0.pdf).

forthcoming. Furthermore, in 2018 the Forest Department issued another logging concession to Colin Monsanto in the same area in which Jimmy Lazano had been working, again in contravention of the Consent Order.

45. The government has failed on two separate occasions to intervene on behalf of Maya villagers in Jalacte in their attempts to evict trespassers from their land. The first instance involves Kent Chun, who has taken residency and built on property within the Jalacte village, without the consent of the village, asserting that he has the right, as a Belizean, to reside anywhere he chooses. The village first sent Mr. Chun a cease and desist letter on 15 September 2016 and has yet to receive assistance from the government in removing Mr. Chun, despite requesting assistance directly from the Attorney General, Michael Peyrefitte. The second instance of trespass on Jalacte lands concerns the fencing of lands near Palo Grande without the consent of the village. To date, neither issue has been resolved.
46. In February 2017, officers from the Forestry Department burned Maya agricultural camps and damaged produce and fruit trees in the San Pedro Colombia village, which the Department considered to be illegal. The village takes the position that the land, in the forest reserve, constituted the traditional farming land of the Maya peoples. The village has reached out to the Chief Forest Officer, Wilber Sabido, in an attempt to achieve redress for the affected families, who relied on the farms to make a living. The village leaders requested a meeting with the Department to reach an amicable solution, but no reply has been received.
47. Further issues have come to light in recent months, and investigations are ongoing. Maya lands in San Pedro Columbia village are being parceled and sold to Cacao companies from local farmers, without the consent of the village. It is unclear how the purchasing is taking place, but three such incidents have been reported, with Maya Mountain Cacao and Pieni Cacao companies buying or leasing land from private individuals, absent the village's approval. Furthermore, lands in the San Isidro village have been surveyed and sold, under the cover of residence fees, paid by Belizeans living abroad in the U.S., and without the approval of the village.
48. To date, the Government has provided no guidance as to how such issues ought to be reported, nor as to what person or entity is responsible for resolving them. The petitioners have sent letters to the TLMR Commission, the Attorney General, and the Forestry Department advising of such incursions, all of which have been met with silence.
49. The government of Belize continues to engage in harmful acts that undermine the rights of the Maya peoples, including parceling Maya village lands to private individuals, granting development concessions on Maya traditional lands, and ignoring third party incursions on Maya village lands, in contravention to the Maya peoples' rights to property as they are protected under the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and affirmed in the UNDRIP.

### Civil and Political Rights

#### *The Right to be Free from Arbitrary Arrest or Detention*

**ICCPR arts. 9(1), 21; UDHR arts. 3, 9, 20(1); UNDRIP art. 7(1)**

50. The government of Belize has purposefully targeted Maya peoples for defending their human rights, subjecting them to unfounded criminal proceedings in order to paralyze or delegitimize their cause, in violation of the Maya peoples' rights to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention, and their right to peaceable assembly and association as protected by the ICCPR, and expressed in the UDHR and the UNDRIP.
51. The problem of the misuse of criminal law by state and non-state actors with the aim to criminalize the work of human rights defenders is a subject of intense interest to human rights proponents, as evidenced by the recent report by the IACHR,<sup>19</sup> and the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz.<sup>20</sup> Ms. Tauli-Corpuz is currently engaged in consultation and dialogue with affected groups to prepare a thematic report on the subject of criminalization of human rights defenders, which will be presented this September before the Human Rights Council.
52. In 2015, the village of Santa Cruz held a meeting to discuss options to resolve Mr. Myles' intrusion on the sacred site of Uxbenká, discussed *supra* paras. 27–30. At that meeting, Mr. Myles showed up and threatened the villagers if his structure was removed. Fearing for their safety, the village police arrested Mr. Myles, and requested assistance from the local police. When it became apparent that no help was forthcoming, Mr. Myles was released.
53. Within days, the Belize Police arrested twelve prominent village members, including their traditional leader, and Cristina Coc, a renown indigenous and human rights defender and a key Maya women's rights leader. The Santa Cruz Thirteen, as they would be come to be known, were held in Punta Gorda under charges of assault and false imprisonment. After conducting no local investigation, the Attorney General went on national radio on June 25, 2015 and stated the village leaders were wrong for detaining Mr. Myles and rebuked them for preventing any Belizean from living anywhere in Belize, making no mention of Mr. Myles desecration of the Maya sacred site. There have also been threats of violence made against Maya people on national radio, and on 28 June 2015, a vehicle entered the village of Santa Cruz and fired several rounds of ammunition into the air.
54. After nearly a year of traveling from their rural village into Punta Gorda Town, the Santa Cruz Thirteen (as they had come to be known locally) all had their charges dismissed, but not until they were harassed a number of times in person and in the media.

## **V. Questions**

---

<sup>19</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *Criminalization of the Work of Human Rights Defenders*, OEA/Ser.L/V/II.Doc.49/15 (2015), available at <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/criminalizaion2016.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, A/71/281 (2016).

Given that previous UPR cycles have specifically identified the government of Belize's failure to protect and affirm the Maya peoples' customary land title, what is preventing the government from engaging in good faith negotiation to delimit, demarcate, and title Maya territory?

Resolving Indigenous issues is addressing historical wrongs that are complex and resource demanding. Why has the Government of Belize not accepted or sought independent expertise and support from the IACHR, EMRIP, other relevant UN mechanism in the implementation of the CCJ Orders?

The Maya Consultation Framework has been noted as a good practice by expert reports such as EMRIP, why does the government of Belize not work with the Maya people to use the framework as a guide to develop a consultation process for the implementation of the court orders that would result in good faith and meaningful consultation?

How has the Government of Belize incorporated the CCJ orders in initiatives that interacts with lands and resources that aims to cover the community lands of the 39 Maya villages such as REDD+, Climate change projects, infrastructure projects?

## **VI. Recommendations**

Accordingly, the Maya Leaders Alliance and Cultural Survival urge the government of Belize to:

- a) clarify the mandate of the Toledo Maya Land Rights Commission so that it can work in partnership with the MLA to adopt meaningful consultation policies, and move more quickly to create an effective method to demarcate and title Maya land;
- b) recognize and publicly support the existence and validity of Maya customary rights over lands and resources, in accordance with the report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the judgments of the Supreme Court of Belize and the Caribbean Court of Justice;
- c) develop, through fully informed consultations with the Maya peoples, a legal framework to delimitate, demarcate, and title the territory of the Maya peoples of Belize;
- d) refrain from acting, or permitting or tolerating third parties to act, in ways that might affect the existence, value, use, or enjoyment of the property located within the geographic area occupied and used by the Maya peoples, until such time as it has developed a mechanism to delineate, demarcate, and title or otherwise protect Maya lands in the Toledo District; and,
- e) repair the environmental damage resulting from logging and other concessions and leases extended on Maya lands.